

### The prosodic significance of Donne's "accidentals"

In the case of Donne, we are confronted with two extraordinary facts which are of the greatest interest to those who wish to consider the question of what his text (as a poet) is held to be and what in fact Donne might have liked it to be if he had seen his poems through the press. On the one hand, Donne's verse has acquired a reputation for prosodic "roughness" which we could never feel sure was intended by him or caused by his copyists (printers and scribes); on the other hand, we have in recent years gained access to a copy of a poem in his own hand which, although it is only one poem, is informative enough to let us measure Donne's reputation for roughness against the exact details of what he wrote, and thus to get some idea as to whether the roughness which critics think they can see is real and intended by Donne, or a matter of the way his text has come to us. There is, of course, also the theoretical possibility that the discovery of a poem in Donne's own hand would have forced us into concluding that the gap between his own version and those which we had known is so big that we actually had no idea of which **words** Donne wrote, and in which order. However, we may feel fairly confident that in general there is in this respect little that Donne's own manuscript (or presumably manuscripts if more were found) can tell us other than what we already knew: it is not the words about which Donne's autograph proves revealing, but the spelling and punctuation which he uses to indicate to the reader how those words are meant to be sounded, thus enabling us to gauge his prosodic intentions.

The expression that we have in recent years "gained access" to an autograph version of a poem by Donne stands in need of modification. Most of us will never be allowed to handle the actual sheet on which the poem, a verse letter to the Lady Carey, is written. It is in the possession of the Bodleian Library in Oxford, and I was permitted to inspect the manuscript itself only after I had persuaded the librarian-in-charge that a transcript of the poem by Dame Helen Gardner contained a number of startling but important inaccuracies if the facsimile published by the Library in conjunction with Scholar Mansell<sup>1</sup> could be at all relied upon accurately to reproduce the original. (The facsimile, which turned out to be of excellent quality, accompanies Dame Helen's transcript - with comment - in a booklet entitled **John Donne's holograph of "A Letter to the Lady Carey and Mrs Essex Riche".**)

The average reader of Donne not only will gain no access to the manuscript, but will not necessarily either see or be able to decipher the facsimile version mentioned (or another should there be one). For these reasons, and because Dame Helen's transcript -

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<sup>1</sup> London, 1972.

which in any case is not widely available - contains several errors, it will, I hope, be useful and interesting to provide a transcript here.

Madame,  
 Here, where by all, all Saints invoked are,  
 T'were too much Scisme to bee singulare,  
 And gainst a practise generall to war,  
 -----  
 yett, turninge to Saints, should my'Humilitee  
 To other Saint, then yow, directed bee, 5  
 That were to make my Scisme Heresee.  
 -----  
 nor would I bee a Convertite so cold  
 As not to tell ytt; If thys bee to bold,  
 Pardons are in thys Market cheaply sold.  
 -----  
 where, because Fayth ys in too lowe degree, 10  
 I thought yt some Apostleship in mee  
 To speak things wch by Fayth alone I see:  
 -----  
 That ys, of yow; who are a firmament  
 Of vertues, where no one ys growen, nor spent;  
 Thay'are yor Materialls, not yor Ornament. 15  
 -----  
 Others, whom wee call vertuous, are not so  
 In theyr whole Substance, but theyr vertues grow  
 But in theyr Humors, and at Seasons show.  
 -----  
 For when through tastles flatt Humilitee,  
 In Doe-bakd men, some Harmelesnes wee see, 20  
 Tis but hys Flegme that's vertuous, and not hee.  
 -----  
 So ys the Blood sometimes; who euer ran  
 To Danger vnimportund, hee was than  
 no better then a Sanguine vertuous man.  
 -----  
 So Cloystrall Men who in pretence of fear, 25  
 All Contributions to thys Lyfe forbear,  
 Have vertu in Melancholy, and onely there.  
 -----  
 spirituall Cholerique Critiqs, wch in all  
 Religions find faults, and forgiue no fall,  
 Have, th'rough thys Zeale, vertu, but in theyr Gall. 30  
 -----  
 we'are thus but parcell-gilt; To Gold we'are growen,  
 when vertu ys our Soules Complexione;  
 who knowes hys vertues Name, or Place, hath none.  
 -----  
 vertu ys but Aguishe, when tis Seuerall;  
 By'Occasion wak'd, and Circumstantiall; 35  
 True vertu ys Soule, allways in all deeds all.  
 -----  
 Thys vertu, thinkinge to giue Dignitee  
 To yor Soule, found there no infirmittee;  
 for yor Soule was as good vertu as shee.  
 -----  
 shee therefore wrought upon that part of yow, 40  
 wch ys scarce lesse then Soule, as shee could doe,  
 And soe hath made yor Beauty vertue too;  
 -----  
 Hence comes yt, that yor Beauty wounds not harts  
 As others, wth prophane and Sensuall darts,  
 But, as an Influence, vertuous thoughts imparts. 45

But if such frinds, by the'honor of yor Sight  
 Grow capable of thys so great a light,  
 As to partake yor vertues, and theyr might,  
 ----  
 what must I thinke that Influence must doe,  
 where yt finds Simpathy, and Matter too,  
 vertu, and Beauty, of the same stuffe, as yow: 50  
 ----  
 wch ys, yor noble worthy Sister; shee,  
 Of whom, if what in thys my extasye,  
 And Reuelation of yow both, I see,  
 ----  
 I should write here, As in short Galleryes 55  
 The Master at the end large glasses tyes,  
 So to present the roome twice to or eyes,  
 ----  
 So I should giue thys letter length, and say  
 That wch I sayd of yow; Ther ys no way  
 from eyther, but by th'other, not to stray.  
 ---- 60  
 May therefore thys bee'inough to testify  
 My true Deuotion, free from flattery.  
 He that beleeus himselfe, doth never ly.

After completion, the paper was folded and addressed "To the Honorable lady the lady Carew". All the writing is unmistakably in Donne's hand, but the manuscript does not bear his name.

The following is a list of my departures from Dame Helen Gardner's transcript:

Line	Dame Helen's reading	My reading
--	Madame/	Madame,
3	war;	war,
4	Yett	yett
4	my Humilitee	my'Humilitee
13	yow,	yow;
20	Doe-baked	Doe-bakd
29	Religions,	Religions
30	through	th'rough
34	vertu	vertú
37	give	giue
40	yow	yow,
44	sensuall	Sensuall
60	From	from

When I first observed Dame Helen's errors they seemed so startling as to be almost unbelievable. However, careful examination of the manuscript itself confirmed that what the facsimile suggested Donne might have produced was actually what he had written, and many - though not all - of my corrections are also offered by Nicolas Barker.<sup>2</sup> As it happened, I came across Barker's article only **after** I had examined Dame Helen's transcript against the facsimile and the original manuscript, so that I can testify

<sup>2</sup> Donne's "Letter to the Lady Carey and Mrs. Essex Riche": Text and Facsimile, **The Book Collector** 22, 1973, 487-93.

that he and I have independently come to the same conclusions. My only disagreement with Barker is that he did not go far enough: he was somewhat hesitant about the comma after "Madame"; he did not observe in line 3 that what looks like a semi-colon after "war" is in fact made up of a comma and a leak-through of the "I" of "Influence" written on the other side of the page (this is visible even on the facsimile, but clearer on the original); in lines 29 and 30 Barker failed to note that what Dame Helen had interpreted as a comma after "Religions" in line 29 is quite definitely an apostrophe in "th'rough" (not "through") in the next line; and in line 34 he, like Dame Helen, did not see the curious mark over the "u" of "vertu".

The only instance in which I believe Dame Helen **may** be right is that of "yett" in line 4, which could be "Yett"; some of Donne's capitals are not quite distinct as such (thus in line 24 he may have intended "Man" rather than "man"). Nevertheless, we are still left with a large number of corrections to Dame Helen's transcript; and the differences between her readings and mine are by no means trivial.

As Dame Helen recognizes in her comments on the manuscript, its interest "lies less in its substantive readings than its accidentals" (p.5). The distinction between what is "substantive" and what is "accidental", common and conventional among editors, is unfortunate in that it suggests that such matters as spelling, supposedly "accidental", are not really essential to a poem. Thus, for example, Dame Helen comments on the fact that in line 13 the manuscript has "are" while the first printed edition of the bulk of Donne's poems, in 1633, has "is". No doubt such a "substantive" difference is important, although it is less substantive than it looks: "is" makes sense, and the chief interest of "are", by comparison, is that it is grammatical. In any case, for the literary reader, as distinct from the editor, there can be little point in considering such differences, as, obviously, what Donne himself wrote must, to anyone but an editor or bibliographer, be of far greater interest than what was included in a first edition which he did not supervise (and in which "is" very probably results from someone **by accident** copying that word twice, remembering "That is" while producing "who is" almost immediately after). By contrast, the "accidentals", which Dame Helen in a number of cases copies so badly and about which she has not much illuminating material to contribute, are actually of the utmost importance in giving us a precise indication of how Donne viewed the syllabic make-up of words (and combinations of words) and the relationship between this matter and that of speech rhythm/metre; while it is equally as vital to see whether his punctuation is grammatical, rhetorical, or metrical - or a combination of two or three of these. Such questions - and I merely raise some of them - are fundamental to the way the poem communicates some of its most intimate characteristics, particularly as a work of art which so strongly depends on its tone. Any failure, on our part, to understand how Donne meant the poem to

sound (both physically and to the "inner" ear) may as grossly distort it as a misapprehension of a "substantive" matter.

It is illuminating to compare Donne's version of the poem with the one printed in his *Poems* of 1633.<sup>3</sup> This should have led Dame Helen to correct some of her readings, since it, in turn, has "my'humility" in line 4; Donne's "bakd" in line 20 appears as "bak'd"; line 34 supports one's impression that Donne's mark over the "u" of "vertu" is intentional and presumably a poor formation of an apostrophe, for 1633 has "Vertue'is". Limiting ourselves for the moment to spellings and punctuations which may indicate the presence or absence of a syllable, it seems obvious that Donne gave his reader considerable help by pointing out, through his choice of forms, on what principles, at least, the interrelationship between his pronunciation and his prosody operates. The fact (or such it seems) that he does not indicate his pronunciation in every individual instance does not imply that he is not quite consistent in those instances where he does. In lines 2 and 3, 1633 uses the apostrophe in a more "regular" way than Donne by printing "There" and "gainst" instead of Donne's "T'were" and "gainst", but Donne's forms are clear enough in intent, and establish immediately that he is selecting them to fit into ten-syllable lines. But, while "gainst" is a form which does not need an apostrophe, Donne does not confront the reader with doubt about "my Humilitee" in line 4 (as Dame Helen does). And in line 20, if he had indeed written "Doe-baked", our inclination would have been to pronounce that as trisyllabic, just as "invoked" actually is in line 1. It seems to me that he steers quite a sensible middle course between too much indication and too little, and that the reader is not left in uncertainty even though occasionally it would have been possible (as distinct from necessary) to use, for example, another apostrophe.

Let us consider the question in some more detail to see whether my assertions are actually supported by the facts.

First, as to verbal forms ending in **-ed** or **-d**, Donne is absolutely consistent in using **-ed** only where the metre requires a syllable. He does not otherwise appear to distinguish between "bakd" (line 20) and "wak'd" (line 35), both of which appear to him to be acceptable forms of words where **-ed** is not syllabic. Again, such short forms are used with absolute consistency, although Dame Helen's "baked" would suggest otherwise - an error the more serious because the poem offers us so few forms to base a generalization on. Ironically, the modern reader is in this respect better served by what remains the best edition of Donne's poems in our century, that by Herbert J.C. Grierson,<sup>4</sup> who quite consistently prints "invoked" (line 1), "bak'd" (line 20), "unimportun'd" (line 23), and "wak'd" (line 35), although Grierson had no access to Donne's own

<sup>3</sup> Facsimile reprint, Scolar Press, Menston, 1969.

<sup>4</sup> *The Poems of John Donne*, Oxford, 1912; reprinted 1980.

manuscript, and chiefly relied on 1633, which he rightly saw as his best source "taken all over".<sup>5</sup>

In non-verbal forms, Donne uses the apostrophe less frequently than the 1633 text, but, as regards function, the difference is one of degree, not principle, and the few instances of the absence of the sign in 1633 do not cause ambiguity; indeed, the situation is the same in Donne's own text, where apostrophes might have been expected in line 27:

Have vertu in Melancholy, and onely there.

However, since we know from apostrophes in previous lines that we must elide syllables in appropriate places to secure decasyllabic lines, it is very easy to supply apostrophes in the text here in accordance with what must have been Donne's pronunciation:

Have vertu'in Mel'ncholy, and onely there.

In theory there are of course other possibilities. In practice, however, this is the most likely solution. The first and most obvious point is that "Mél'nchōlý" (with stress on the final syllable which may be weaker, stronger than or equal to that of the first) "fits the metre". This is not at all conclusive, but, if the pronunciation was at all current, Donne may well have preferred such correspondence, since in this instance there was no compelling reason for using a speech rhythm which clashed with the underlying metrical pattern. Furthermore, **OED** specifies explicitly under the noun "Melancholy" that down to the seventeenth century "the poetical examples commonly indicate stress on the second or fourth syllable"; this makes a stress on the final syllable at least a firm possibility. And if we turn to Shakespeare as an example of another author using this word, we find that in his verse "Mél'nchōlý" was obviously regular - the following are merely four of many instances that could be adduced, and I deliberately take them from two plays wide apart in time and type:<sup>6</sup>

When I am dull with care and melancholy  
(**The Comedy of Errors**, I.ii.20)

But moody and dull melancholy  
(**Idem**, V.1.79)

The sad companion, dull-ey'd melancholy  
(**Pericles**, I.ii.2)

And will awake him from his melancholy  
(**Idem**, II.iii.92)

In other words, there does not seem to be any good reason for believing that Donne would have stressed the second syllable rather than elide it. Yet, presumably, in view of **OED**'s information, it is

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<sup>5</sup> Vol. 2, cxv.

<sup>6</sup> I quote from **Complete Works**, ed. Peter Alexander, London, 1951.

stress on the second syllable which W. Milgate has in mind,<sup>7</sup>  
printing

Have Vertue'in **Melancholy**, 'and only there

with, one supposes, elision of "and" resulting in a blending of 'nd and the next syllable (the comma surely keeps it independent of the last syllable of "**Melancholy**"). I believe that a reader in Donne's time would have had no difficulty at all in coming to what I consider to be the correct conclusion about this line; indeed a modern reader with an open mind about Donne's syllabification and accentuation can also, in my experience, get the interpretation right without turning to the **OED** or Shakespeare. Dame Helen at the least exaggerates when she says (p.6) that Donne here "leaves the reader to his own devices", for, **pace** Milgate, there really is no problem.

The only line which, I think, does constitute a problem is line 51:

vertu, and Beauty, of the same stufte, as yow

Milgate, without access to Donne's manuscript, elided "beauty'of" - quite naturally, since 1633 has no comma between these words. Donne, having a comma after both "vertu" and "Beauty", as well as "stufte", does leave the reader to his own devices here, although Dame Helen is confident that he elided "Vertue,'and" (**sic**). This is the one place in the poem where I think Donne fails to give the reader enough guidance, and it is quite conceivable that his contemporaries felt so too, with the result that in 1633 the comma after "Beauty" was deliberately omitted. On balance, I am inclined to think that Dame Helen is right: it is a good deal easier to combine "nd Beau" than "of the". Still, one cannot help feeling that it would have been perfectly possible for Donne to combine a comma and an apostrophe.

The fact remains, though, that with the possible exception of this line, we can work out Donne's syllabification quite consistently throughout his poem. It is not difficult to see how he goes about getting his ten syllables per line. Obviously "Scisme" is disyllabic in lines 2 and 6, for example. In line 25 the spelling "Cloystrall" indicates a pronunciation not necessarily understood from 1633's "cloysterall". Line 28 offers some seeming problems which however are readily solved: "spiritual" is pronounced as a disyllabic "spritual" (a reduced form quite common in Donne's time in pronunciation and even in spelling), while "Cholerique" is obviously to be articulated as "chol'ric". Unmarked but obvious elision further occurs in line 32 where "vertu ys" is sounded "vertu's", while "Complexione", rhyming with "growen" and "none", and having to complete a decasyllabic line, consists of four syllables (with stresses on the second syllable and the fourth).

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<sup>7</sup> In his edition, **John Donne: The Satires, Epigrams and Verse Letters**, Oxford, 1967.

Line 35 is constructed on a somewhat similar model, with elision (twice) early on, yet "Circumstantiall" fully pronounced with five syllables (stress on the last to rhyme with "all" in 36). Different pronunciations are to be adopted, to an extent, for different circumstances: thus "Influence" is disyllabic in line 45, but trisyllabic in line 49 (where, moreover, it appears to have some stress on its third syllable, although the pronunciation of line 45 suggests that this was becoming optional). Such choices are hardly a matter of Donne's fitting pronunciation to the metre artificially; he does seem to select pronunciations according to metrical requirements, but only from those which actually existed in the language, not as unnatural forms. Many of such alternatives are immediately accessible to us, or indeed are still with us.

Again and again literary histories, editions and books of criticism tell us of Ben Jonson's (alleged) opinion that "for not keeping of accent" Donne "deserved hanging". Now that we know that syllabically the poem is entirely regular, can we support Ben Jonson about the matter of accent? Presumably he meant, not that Donne could not be allowed any flexibility, but that, even if one tried to read the lines with due allowance for e.g. elision, there were too many places where (as he thought) it was impossible to "square" any normal reading of a line with the notion that it was meant to be iambic. How justified was Ben Jonson in this view?

This is not one of Donne's most irregular poems, but even here there are many instances of what seems to be a deliberate "clashing" of the speech rhythm against the metre. It is not as though Donne is not fully in control: his meticulous handling of his spelling and punctuation makes plain that he knew very well what he was doing. It is not, either (as I think was the case with Wyatt), that he uses a syllabically regular mould but has accents which hover somewhere in between those of the "old" alliterative mould and the new iambic one. Donne's **penchant** for accentual irregularity is carefully cultivated to become a deliberate shock effect. The shock arises from the very circumstance that the poem is syllabically so highly regular, and shows in this respect as well as the comparatively frequent correspondence between metrical and rhythmical stress that Donne very much has the iambic "norm" in mind, while yet he sees that correspondence as a convention to violate rather than to adhere to slavishly. It is in this **combination** of factors that his prosodic rebelliousness lies. One may say that even the rhymes are handled in deliberately impeccable fashion; no doubt the words indicated as rhymes actually did rhyme, as the spelling, too, fairly often suggests (though there may be some instances of "eye-rhyme" where the spelling points to no more than just that). The punctuation, on the other hand, is to jolt us into an awareness of the "speaking voice" which critics are so fond of associating with Donne. Let me consider some examples.

In the very first line, 1633 has:

Here where by All All Saints invoked are



which the reader can easily interpret as

Hére whére bý Áll Āll Sáints Īnvókéd áre

thinking of the line as "basically iambic, but with an inverted first foot, a so-called case of 'trochaic substitution', and this effect may very well have been intended by the 1633 editor. Although it seems rather difficult not to think of "All All" as a combination of rather strong stresses, one may feel a temptation to read a foot-division after the first "All", imagining a break after which the second "All" starts on a weaker note, forming an iamb with "Saints",

Donne by contrast produces this:

Here, where by all, all Saints invoked are

which actually does have a punctuation mark after the first "all", but where the reader's tendency to think in feet is discouraged, with the result that their very existence becomes much harder to imagine. The line is not necessarily one which would have greatly upset Ben Jonson, but it could have assisted his case, both in the 1633 version and - much more prominently - in Donne's own.

In general, it may be said that Donne's own presentation of his poem creates an impression of a speaking voice caring far less about abstract considerations of either metre or grammar than the editor of 1633. We might as well look at lines 3-6, which 1633 prints like this:

Yet turning to Saints, should my'humility  
To other Saint then you directed bee,  
That were to make my schisme, heresie.

Donne has:

yett, turninge to Saints, should my'Humilitee  
To other Saint, then yow, directed bee,  
That were to make my Scisme Heresee.

We should not assume that 1633 derives directly from Donne's manuscript as we know it, but most likely it is based on a version, by Donne himself, which he did not send to the Lady Carey but which was virtually identical. Assuming that it was, we may note how 1633 quite arbitrarily excludes the comma after "Yet". Grammatically and rhetorically, this is wholly appropriate within Donne's version, but it must have been felt by someone copying the poem (or marking it for copying) that the comma too strongly prevented the reader from seeing iambs. In the next line the commas in Donne's version are not actually incompatible with the notion of feet, for they mark off a foot, but they are probably designed to make the phrase "then yow" stand out rhetorically; presumably Donne's contemporaries thought such emphasis superfluous, and even detrimental to a comfortable awareness of what was to be the line's iambic "flow" as well as its syntax. The concept of "ease in reading" on a syntactic level also appears to have resulted in 1633's "schisme, heresie", which rhetorically creates a quite annoying and useless break, is not

grammatically necessary, and is adopted even though it disturbs one's notion of feet (so that, curiously, a notion of grammatical decorum/clarity here overrides the preoccupation with "feet").

Donne's sense of pause is certainly an important factor in creating the impression that he did not care as much about "keeping of accent" as Ben Jonson did. This is so even where his pauses are metrically by no means inappropriate, as in line 13, where he is coming to a climax with the graceful compliment:

That ys, of yow; who are a firmament

where Dame Helen and 1633 have a mere comma after "yow". The 1633 version is no doubt intended to create a sense of automatic repetition ("That is/ of you/ who are/ ..."), while by contrast Donne's own punctuation is designed to lead up to a marked emphasis on "yow" followed by a strong pause. The pause coincides, of course, with a foot division, and one can see it as a traditional medial break ("caesura"); but the emphasis on this word is so central - not merely within the line but within its whole context - that the reader simply does not (or at least not at first) think of feet at all. This is not to say that Donne is not "keeping accent", but rather that the keeping of accent is, with him, very much a secondary consideration.

There are several instances of Donne's not "keeping accent", as in lines 37-39:

Thys vertu, thinkinge to giue Dignitee  
To yor Soule, found there no infirmitee;  
for yor Soule was as good vertu as shee.

Those are probably lines of the kind Ben Jonson meant. One way of demonstrating that he has a point is to quote the lines as though they were prose: "Thys vertu, thinkinge to giue Dignitee to yor Soule, found there no infirmitee; for yor Soule was as good vertu as shee". Of course one could quite reasonably advance the argument that Donne himself does not set out the statement as prose, but as verse, so that he may well have wanted us to be aware of the line-endings (bringing out the rhymes and vice versa). No doubt this is to an extent true, but not sufficiently to remove the effect of accentual irregularity which is a feature of both presentations. Even the notion of line-endings and one's awareness of rhymes are counter-acted by the unpredictable, natural way in which the pauses are managed, and one would have difficulty arguing that, for example, in the first line the stress on "Thys" could easily be made weaker than the first syllable of "vertu", while "trochaic substitution" is not clearly indicated either (both the natural stress-pattern and the comma after "vertu" seem to militate against this concept). The word "thinkinge", after the comma, draws attention to itself as a "strong"- "weak" pattern - inimical to the idea of iambic scansion. All in all, it is very difficult to see how this line could be "scanned" at all - which however is a view one is less readily forced into when confronted with 1633's

This Vertue thinking to give dignitie

where one might consider the possibility that the line is iambically "regular" after "trochaic substitution" in the first foot. Still, such an attempt would be pretty spasmodic, and nothing of this kind can be dreamt up with respect to the next line in 1633, "To your soule, found there no infirmitie".

In any case, whether in Donne's own version or in any contemporary copies Ben Jonson may have known, there certainly are difficulties in our way if we look for lines which will invariably "scan", and one's answer to Ben Jonson should be that the reader ought not to - that Donne, while syllabically regular, and practising a degree of accentual regularity, felt quite free to produce lines which, to a smaller or lesser extent, were not capable of being read as iambic. This poem is not as conspicuously "rough" in this regard as some. The Satires, notably, provide examples.

Even with respect to these, however, critics have made some quite exaggerated remarks. One of Donne's recent editors, A.J. Smith<sup>8</sup> claims that "modern commentators agree that Donne wrote harshly by design" yet quotes C.S. Lewis's amazing statement, "Accents are violently misplaced (ii.7), extra syllables are thrust in (ii.49), and some lines defy scansion altogether (I.13, ii.103)".<sup>9</sup> How correct is Lewis in these claims?

Lewis's first example appears in Satire II as follows (line 7 in 1633):

Though like the Pestilence and old fashion'd love  
which, adopting a traditional prosodic approach, reads comfortably enough as an iambic line with a trochaic first foot:

Thóugh líke thé Pést'lénce ánd òld fáshíon'd lóve  
- hardly an instance of a line with "violently misplaced accents" even if smoother ones can be imagined and, of course, exist. As for the "extra syllables" supposedly "thrust in", II.49 in 1633 reads

A motion, Lady, Speake Cocus; I have been  
which is a decasyllabic line provided one elides "I've been".

Nevertheless, while these examples seem unfortunate, Lewis has a general point. Certainly I.13 does "defy scansion altogether" in 1633:

First swear by thy best love in earnest  
which appears to be a line deliberately irregular not only in accentuation, but also in having - exceptionally - nine syllables which no normal approach could convert into ten. II.103 is decasyllabic in 1633, but accentually hardly iambic:

Where are those spred woods which cloth'd hertofore

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<sup>8</sup> John Donne: *The Complete English Poems*, Harmondsworth, 1971; reprinted 1976.

<sup>9</sup> *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century excluding Drama*, Oxford, 1954, 469.

and such lines must be regarded as examples of Donne's not "keeping accent". It is normal in iambic verse for the speech rhythm to depart from the metre to some extent, but usually, even if in some places no natural reading could fully bring out the iambic base, that base will nevertheless come to the surface readily enough; this is the sort of line which appears to be designed to make any iambic reading quite impossible.

The line is not nearly as abnormal, in these Satires, as quotation in isolation from its context might make it look. To get an idea of Donne's general procedure, let us consider for example the beginning of the well-known third satire as it appears in 1633:

Kinde pittie chokes my spleene; brave scorn forbids  
 Those teares to issue which swell my eye-lids,  
 I must not laugh, nor weepe sinnes, and be wise,  
 Can railing then cure these worne maladies?  
 Is not our Mistresse faire Religion, 5  
 As worthy of all our Soules devotion,  
 As vertue was in the first blinded age?  
 Are not heavens joyes as valiant to asswage  
 Lusts, as earths honour was to them? Alas,  
 As wee do them in meanes; shall they surpasse 10  
 Us in the end and shall thy fathers spirit  
 Meete blinde Philosophers in heaven, whose merit  
 Of strict life may be imputed faith, and heare  
 Thee, whom hee taught so easie wares and neare  
 To follow, damn'd? O if thou dar st, feare this. 15

There is no reason for supposing that the text corresponds exactly to what Donne wrote originally, but a comparison between Donne's manuscript version of the Letter to the Lady Carey and the 1633 text can hardly lead us to believe that the 1633 version of the Satires is very inaccurate; certainly it is not likely to represent the poem in a condition less smooth than Donne's own composition was. Most likely the chief difference, from our point of view, is that in the original Donne's punctuation would have indicated rhetorical demarcation between phrases, so that the lines looked even less iambic than they do in 1633.

Of course, we must assume that the lines were as a rule intended to be decasyllabic, and the apostrophes in line 15 no doubt show what Donne considered to be necessary elisions. On the basis of what we have seen so far, we can work out with reasonable confidence what Donne's syllabification must have been in this passage. In lines 1-4, the syllabification is evident and requires no special modification. In line 5, if we pronounced "Religion" as trisyllabic, we would get only nine syllables, and it is in any case by no means unlikely that Donne saw that word as consisting of four syllables, with stress on the final **-on** as well as on the second syllable. It thus forms a natural enough rhyme (clearer than now) with "devotion" in line 6, where, to make the line decasyllabic, "worthy of" must have been "worthy'of". There is nothing forced about these assumptions, which are based on what we have observed Donne did in his own manuscript, and which are entirely in keeping with what are obviously facts of pronunciation and prosody in his time. We must allow for these pronunciations because (a) they were either the normal ones in Donne's time or at least possible, and (b)

where we have a choice between various linguistically real possibilities, it is logical to conclude that Donne used those options which made the lines decasyllabic, since - although not in 100% of cases - syllabic regularity was a norm which he strove to maintain, the "roughness" of the verses being accentual. Thus there must also have been an elided syllable in line 8, but a difficulty for the reader of 1633 is that it is impossible to tell which: most probably Donne read "heav'ns", since that pronunciation was so frequent in his time, and we should not assume that he would have felt a craving for accentual regularity which would start the line with "Aren't". The pronunciation of "heavens" as "heav'n" is not contradicted, anyway, by the fact that if we read "heav'n" in line 12 we there, too, secure syllabic regularity, inasmuch as the line, although still containing eleven syllables, is presumably to be thought of as being "within the system", syllabically, since the extra syllable at the end is that of a "weak" ("feminine") rhyme ("spirit" - "merit"), and in such cases the final syllable was traditionally not held to count.

If this interpretation is correct, it is conceivable that Donne read "Philosophers" with a degree of stress on the final syllable, and again this would have been likely enough in his time. But - and this point is crucially important - we cannot in any sense assume a systematic correlation between his metrical stresses and those of his speech, either within his poetry or outside it. If we read "Rélígión" in line 5, we should do so because we accept that this pronunciation was perhaps Donne's anyhow and happens to secure syllabic regularity, **not** because we wish to make the line accentually smooth; for there are far too many places where the stresses of speech rhythm do not coincide with those of the metre to warrant the conclusion that his metre will enable us to discover what his accentuation must have been. Of course correspondence may occur by chance: thus we might argue that we know the stresses of "Religion" because the line needs four syllables, which is not to say those syllables must correspond to an **iambic** pattern. We may feel confident that in line 13 Donne elided "be'imputed", but not that such elision is required to make the line accentually regular. The general nature and problems of Donne's versification should thus be clear to us. He appears to have believed in syllabic regularity, and we can form a reasonable notion of how we are to pronounce the lines in the light of this. However, our knowledge of his accentuation is likely to remain limited, since his syllabification can give us only limited information about it, while what we do know about the pronunciation of English in Donne's time is not enough to enable us to suppose that we can usefully deduce from such knowledge what degree of accentual regularity he may have intended in his verse. Given the accentual "roughness" of lines 1-15 of Satire 3 (a roughness which no assumption about English in Donne's time can straighten out), we have to conclude that we are not entitled to believe that we can systematically infer his accentuation in speech from his practice in verse. The safest

assumption is that we should try to regularize the lines syllabically in such ways as I have discussed; doing that, we shall also observe that Donne (as may be expected from a poet of his time) accentuated some words in ways unaccustomed to us now, but we shall not regularize his verse accentually and should not try to do so. Insofar as we can tell, Donne did not intend such regularity, but, on the contrary, wished his readers to have the iambic decasyllabic line in mind as a norm to be departed from as well as to be adhered to - the degree of correspondence to depend solely on what Donne felt to be appropriate, at any time, to other demands of his verse. This is not to say that the manipulation of stresses within his poetry is casual; on the contrary, it is deliberate and has a vital part to play in his overall strategy. The shock effects, for example, are one essential way of upsetting such traditional, automatic expectations as readers might bring to the poetry generally - not just in the area of rhythm.

No doubt detailed work on Donne and his period will in due course enable us to get a somewhat more precise idea of the way his verse is to be pronounced (always allowing for variations in individual performance) than we can at present claim to have. The matter is a good deal more complex than a modern editor like Smith would like us to believe, who claims (p.33) that "the only sure guide" to Donne's rhythms is "the accent of the speaking voice in rendering a particular sense". To be fair, Smith does, in spite of this optimistic generalization, give some help to his readers by drawing attention to e.g. elision, trisyllabic "ocean", etc. Still, even the very presentation of his text makes it hard for us to see linguistic facts which the 1633 edition is unambiguous about. Smith knew he could trust 1633 as regards Donne's pronunciation of "invoked" and "unimportuned" in the "Letter to the Lady Carey" (for Donne's manuscript had surfaced, and Smith even refers to it), yet he prints both words with final **-ed**. In all such cases, the reader of Smith's edition is left guessing while there is no need: it seems comforting to read on p.37 that "The distinction has not been kept in the present text because the rhythm of the line itself usually makes it clear which pronunciation is called for" and that "The notes indicate words that might be mispronounced even so", but the whole subject is far more open to argument than these comments allow, and vital information which would enable a reader to make up his own mind is unnecessarily withheld from him. The 1633 forms could in fact have been taken over exactly as they stand: "invoked" and "unimportun'd". Further investigation of Smith's text confirms that it is not a good one for the student of Donne's rhythm to use. For example, in the same poem Smith prints "my humility" in line 4, yet e.g. "By'occasion" in line 35; presumably Smith is following Donne rather than 1633 in line 35 (where 1633 has "By occasion"), but this makes the absence of the apostrophe the more surprising in line 4, where Donne's manuscript confirms that 1633's apostrophe is correct.

The reader who wants to understand the nature of Donne's

pronunciation and rhythm can best do so by, obviously, turning to his autograph manuscript first, which is the reason why we have considered it fairly extensively here. Modern editions are generally best avoided, although Grierson will not seriously mislead us. Research should concern itself intensively with the few poems which were printed during Donne's lifetime, but the non-specialist reader who wishes to get reasonably close to what Donne wrote for his audience will generally derive considerable benefit from studying his verse in the 1633 edition of his *Poems*. Facsimiles are often less clear than is commonly assumed, but a reader who has no access to an actual copy of 1633 can no doubt readily consult the Scolar Press facsimile or the one printed by Da Capo Press.<sup>10</sup>

There are, of course, many scholars and critics who have commented on Donne's prosody, for example, A.C. Partridge.<sup>11</sup> Several aspects of Partridge's discussions are somewhat disappointing, both metrically and linguistically, and not least in that his section on the Letter to the Lady Carey (p.25 ff.) relies heavily on Dame Helen's transcript and Professor Milgate's editing. But a reader who approaches Partridge's book with caution will find much of interest. For example, many of the instances which we are in the habit of seeing as cases of "elision" are probably better regarded as exhibiting "fusion of contiguous vowels, the one ending and the other beginning adjacent words" (p.25): it is indeed difficult to see how else some of the readings suggested by Donne's spelling in the Letter are to be interpreted.

Despite many differences, Partridge confirms the general accuracy of the view of Donne here developed, viz. that he was "an English accentualist, who tried to preserve through elision the habits of an Italian syllabist" (p.29), although I would rather say that he is a syllabist quite deliberately in order that we be made aware of the contrast between his adherence to metre in this respect on the one hand and his rebellious departure on the level of accentual rhythm on the other - a departure both "old" and "modern" for his time, and offered to give a contrived effect of a "living voice" in which the adroit, rhetorical handling of pause is perhaps finally - in Donne's own manuscript - the most arresting and tellingly individual feature within the context of his overall metrical-rhythmical complexity. That complexity is in turn an intimate reflection of his poetic personality.

Joost Daalder  
School of Humanities  
Flinders University

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<sup>10</sup> Amsterdam and New York, 1970.

<sup>11</sup> *John Donne: Language and Style*, London, 1978.